

National Forest Advisory Board (NFAB) Meeting
September 19, 2012
Mystic Ranger District
FINAL DRAFT

Members Present:

Chairman Jim Scherrer, Hugh Thompson, Sam Brannan, Bill Kohlbrand, Tom Blair, Colin Paterson, Ev Hoyt, Nels Smith, Jim Heinert, Mike Verchio, Suzanne Iudicello-Martley, Jeff Vonk

Members Absent:

Lon Carrier, Donovan Sprague, Craig Tieszen, Becci Flanders-Paterson

Forest Service Representatives:

Craig Bobzien, Dennis Jaeger, Steve Kozel, Ralph Adam, Dave Mertz, Jason Virtue, Todd Pechota, Jon Stansfield, Kerry Burns, Katie Van-Alstyne, Rick Hudson, Marie Curtin, and Twila Morris

Others:

Approximately 10 members of the public were in attendance. Three Congressional representatives were also in attendance; Brad Otten (Noem – R, South Dakota), Chris Blair (Johnson – D, South Dakota) and Mark Haugen (Thune – R, South Dakota).

Welcome:

Scherrer: We have a quorum; call the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m.

I've asked Dave Brenneisen to sit at the table with us today. Dave has an application in for the Forest Products Industry position that has been vacated by Carson Engelskirger and Tom Troxel. I want to have the timber industry represented in our discussions. For your information, if there is a vote taken today, Dave will not vote. Join me today in welcoming him to discuss issues related to the timber industry.

Bobzien: Thank you Mr. Chair. We have a number of vacancies we've gone over as well as the expected change over we'll have in 2013. So we are in the process of reviewing a very large number of applications, and the final selection will be done at the Secretary level. Jim did ask me if Dave could sit at the table, and I agreed that it would be fine, knowing that he cannot vote.

Scherrer: Dave, if you don't mind giving us a brief overview of your back ground and what you bring to the table, we would appreciate it.

Brenneisen: I have a forestry degree, and have been working as a Forester for 30 years; a lot of the work I do now, as part of my job, is with the Black Hills National Forest. I was a Forester with Pope & Talbot for 25 years, and have continued with Niemen Timber Company. I look forward to the discussions with this Board.

Scherrer: Thank you Dave.

Approve the Minutes:

Scherrer: Our first item of business is to approve the minutes from the June meeting. The minutes were distributed, comments received and incorporated. Do I have a motion to approve the May minutes? Motion made by Tom Blair, second by Jim Heinert. Is there any discussion? All in favor of approving the minutes as they read say aye; opposed same sign. The June minutes are approved.

Approve the Agenda:

Scherrer: Next item of business is to approve the agenda. Amendment to the agenda was forwarded out on September 17th, does everyone have an up to date copy of the agenda? Do I have a motion to approve the agenda? Motion made by Nels Smith, second by Sam Brannan. Is there any discussion? All in favor of approving the agenda as it reads say aye, opposed same sign, agenda is approved.

Housekeeping:

DFO Craig Bobzien: Welcome back everyone, we had a good field trip this summer – I hope you all had a good summer. We'll be catching up on a number of interests today. In case of an emergency, the main exit is to the front, to the parking lot; or you may exit to the back of the building into the parking lot there. Treats today have been provided by the Boxelder Job Corps.

Meeting Protocols:

Scherrer: Once again, I would ask that cell phones be put on silent. For those in the audience, we have 15 minutes scheduled for public comments at the end of the meeting. Public comments will only be taken if there is time. Folks in the audience are welcome to forward your comments to the Board member that represents you prior to a meeting so that your concerns may be addressed.

Comments to the Chair:

Bobzien: We have a real relevant agenda for what's occurring here today – we have a great turnout today, thank you for your attendance.

Hot Topics

Legislative Updates

Scherrer: Routinely we have the three Congressional delegation folks from SD at our meetings and we invite the Wyoming delegation. We ask each representative to give us an update on issues related to the Forest Service. We'll start with you Mark.

Mark Haugen: Many of our DC staff come out in August; Lynn Churchman made several stops here in the Black Hills in August; one with Carson Engelskirger and I. We went to a timber project by Terry Peak, then over to Custer Peak to see a bird's eye view of the Mountain Pine Beetle (MPB) situation. Some folks from Homeland Security came out this summer. Firefighting falls under homeland security, so they came out for a visit. We went out to the Tatanka hotshot crew quarters, and the helibase.

In DC right now there is a six month continuing resolution (CR) that was passed by the house and coming over to the Senate. The CR provides a small increase to fund firefighting efforts. Seven million acres have been consumed this year by fires, so this is an important issue.

The farm bill has passed the Senate, and with that some of the issues pushed by Senator Thune, regarding MPB, etc. Our best bet is that it will go into the lame duck session and voted on after the election. We do not want to see the farm bill junked and started new. The 2008 farm bill had six extensions so this is nothing new.

Scherrer: Are there any questions for Mark? If not, we'll have Chris go next.

Chris Blair: We are looking at funding out to March 31 with the CR – that puts Agencies like the Forest Service (FS) in a bad situation with budget. Farm bill; we too like the Senate version, we've passed that and it's been sitting in the House for three months. The Senate is adjourning Friday and then we'll reconvene after the election.

Scherrer: Are there any questions for Chris? If not, we'll have Brad go next.

Brad Otten: There was \$423 million put in next year's budget to pay for firefighting efforts. There is a .6 % increase across the board. On the farm bill, the hang up seems to be in the house. There is a discrepancy on how much to cut from food programs. Renee Lateral visited in August as well, and we visited Niemen's sawmill and a timber sale area. Thanks for allowing us to be here and give you some updates.

Scherrer: Thank you Brad. Does the Board have any questions? Thank you all for your updates today and for coming to our meetings every month.

Scherrer: Our next hot topic is the Pine Beetle Response Project (PBRP). We had left this off the agenda inadvertently, but amended the agenda to add this topic. I would like to ask Craig to bring this topic to the table.

Bobzien: The first thing I would like to do is welcome the Board members that just came in. The reason I'm thanking you and the whole board is for the work you did on reviewing our draft document and providing input, and for the value that has added when we submitted the final EIS.

If you received a copy of the EIS, you also received a letter, and in that letter I said that my preference is for Alternative C with modification. Those modifications would be to reduce the number of miles of system road, and add focused treatment in Spearfish Canyon. As you recall, in the letter the Board wrote to me, this patterns very closely with your advice. In the bigger spectrum, your advice, as well as all the other comments, which some in here did submit comments; it was a large volume of good advice that we needed to respond to. That's where we've been spending a lot of time on this – and some fire activity too. The official publication will be this Friday, and then we'll begin the 30 objection period. Then we'll be able to review the objections and see what issues there are and incorporate those into the decision. But basically it's a way to help find out what the public's interests are and end up with the best product as we possibly can.

Yesterday I was at a conference in Colorado and the Chief was speaking to the group. A big share of what he talked about was the fire situation this summer. In the course of his speech, he brought up two projects in the nation that he thought were impactful. One of the projects he talked about was the PBRP. This type of project was what the Chief has in mind when he talks about doing restoration at a faster pace and faster scale. So it's important to us and in a broader scale as well.

Scherrer: Does the Board have any questions or comments?

Blair: This question comes from my wife; when we received the EIS, she said "what kind of man hours goes into a project like that". So I was wondering if you keep track of the amount of time you have invested in this project.

Bobzien: There is a lot of resource information that is gathered over a few years such as archeological surveys, cultural resource surveys, etc.; but realistically, Katie Van Alstyne was is our Team Leader, and we had the better part of a dozen people working the better part of eight to ten months – as well as doing their other projects during that time. The Forest Leadership Team has spent time on this, the Board spent time on this; easily we could say 10 – 12 people for ¾ of a year focus time – it's significant.

Hoyt: I would like to say that I appreciate the adaption of Alternative C which gives credibility to the FS and their efforts to collaborate with the public, this Board, and all others, and supports the fact that the MPB epidemic as a major issue.

Bobzien: Thank you Ev. As you read this, the part that is different than under adaptive management – is what we learned. What part of the science and techniques can we incorporate; that is part and parcel to Alternative C, and that tracks really well with our findings over the period of time.

Scherrer: I would like to express my personal thanks to the Sub-Committee that stepped up did a lot of work on the comments to the FS. Suzanne, Ev, Carson, and Sam; Sam was the Chairperson of the Sub-Committee. I want to thank you guys for what you do.

Speaking of collaboration, moving on to the regular agenda, the “All Lands Strategy” has legs and is moving forward, and it defines the word collaboration. I would like to turn it over to Craig to bring this topic to the table.

Regular Agenda

All Lands MPB Report ~ Greg Josten, Dave Thom, Dave Mertz

Bobzien: Thank you Mr. Chairman. There are three people on the agenda today, and those three all have an important role in this presentation. Greg Josten from the State of SD has agreed to lead this discussion. In your pre-work you should have the narrative, the “Black Hills Regional “All Lands” Mountain Pine Beetle Accomplishment report (BHRMPBS). In the text we’ve summarized the accomplishments of all of the participants. Greg will kick this off; Greg has been a partner with us for a long time. Many of you know Dave Thom; Dave is a retired BHNF employee; I would like to welcome Dave back to our meeting. And from our Staff, Dave Mertz our Natural Resource Staff officer will also be speaking.

Josten: Thank you Craig. What’s happened over the last couple of years is that you’ve heard more about MPB than you’ve ever cared to hear about. It’s a problem through the entire Black Hills, and a large number of groups are responding. The Conservation Leader Group and Working Group are a result of some foresight by Craig Bobzien; he brought all of these groups together to talk about how we can coordinate our efforts. There, was a lot of talk between Agencies, but it was Craig’s actions that brought us all together. We have Counties, States, BLM, Park Service, Conservation Districts, and others all working together to develop a strategy to deal with the MPB epidemic.

I would like to talk about what we’ve accomplished over the past year and one of the things that is most significant is the BHRMPBS. It is a document that a lot of different entities put time and effort into; it is a plan to bring the MPB back to an endemic level rather than an epidemic level. The strategy is one of our biggest accomplishments.

The Accomplishment Report that we’ve been provided a copy of is a credit to Marie Curtin. My hat’s off to her for taking all of the information provided to her and putting it into this document. These numbers are a snap shot in time – if you see numbers in the future, they may vary some from what you see today. The Agencies were in various stages of compiling data when the table was put together.

[Greg reviewed and discussed the numbers, columns, and Agencies in the report]

The state of South Dakota had agreements with Pennington & Lawrence Counties to share the marking and cost share responsibilities. There was a cost share that paid out 75% of landowners costs for those that were treating their trees. All of the marking data from the State and County went out to landowners to let them know how many trees they had infested. The landowner was responsible to treat the trees, the County then made a payment to the landowner; and the State in turn reimbursed the County.

With public lands you can be in a little more control and treat all the trees on a certain piece of ground; with the private landowner, they hire who they want to and at the price they want to. They get the work done and the State and County helps them pay for it.

Pennington County offered assistance with paying for the spraying of trees. There were numerous workshops, out reaches to educate the public. The Conservation District did workshops to help people identify what the MPB is and what they can do about it. In the spring we'll have workshops on spraying.

Dave Mertz: The BHNF just sold their second to the last sale for the year, Custer Mountain, over 30,000 ccf, which puts us over 230,000 ccf for the year; our target from the Regional Office was 207,000 ccf – so it has been a good year for us. Just this morning we were working on refining our program for 2013.

Conservation Leader working group: We've gone thru the Strategy as a group here before, we've got over 30 signatories to the Strategy – still taking names. If your Agency would like to sign on to the Strategy, send your name to Twila. When we get the Strategy list updated, it will be posted on our web-site. The Working Group has met a couple of times since the Strategy was signed. One of the big things was to hire a Coordinator to implement the Strategy. We've been working on getting funding, but we had enough to hire the Coordinator position, and if you recall a major part of that job is to work with all the various players so that we can make sure we get the biggest bang for the buck out of the projects that we're doing and the money we have. Dave Thom is officially hired in the position.

Dave Thom: I wasn't aware how much the NFAB has been involved; but there has been considerable involvement. I'm happy to be involved with National Forest management and to work with Greg and the counties and other partners. I was particularly impressed to see Marie's summary. There are four goals that were developed in the strategy starting with suppression, then long term forest health and a healthy forest industry, and the fourth goal is safety of the public. There are 10 different objectives and 30 action items, and already the action items are getting crossed off – work is already getting done. It will be a pleasure to get involved, and I look forward to working with this group.

Scherrer: I think that the selection of Dave Thom was really a good move on the part of the Working Group. Many of you know that Dave has unique skills of working across all levels of expertise, and he has the horsepower to work with groups. I'm really trickled with having your help; thank you Dave.

I'm glad the Strategy now has legs. One opportunity the group might want to consider; with the number of people involved, under one name focusing like a laser, we are going to have a voice to talk to our legislators, Governor and federal agencies, and I would encourage the group to not hesitate to use the force of unity to push the issue and get work done.

Ev was involved when the regional folks came up and spoke to us about the fact that this forest has great potential to mitigate some of the potential disasters that Colorado has seen. They were so impressed by the number of people that have come together to work in a collaborative effort, I would charge you Dave with the challenge to take advantage of the strength of the number of people involved.

I have one question. What kind of information do you have on this year's beetle flight? We know that the flight has peaked and we are on the downhill side of it; there might be some that haven't found a tree, but by enlarge they have all landed. What is the preliminary impression on the flight? I remember last year distinctly saying - it's not good.

Josten: I think we can expect a heavy flight this year; I don't have specific numbers at this time. One of the challenges this year will be identifying newly infested trees, because of the dry year; the trees are not putting out the pitch tubes like they have in past years. So you'll have to look for sawdust and small weeping spots of pitch. Some of the info we get back is that there are not as many infested trees, but then they go on to another property and it is just hammered. There is a lot of variation. The difficulty in identifying the infested trees may cause some or a lot of infested trees to be missed.

Scherrer: They may have been talking about my property; Brian and Andy and the guys were out to see what has taken place. What's happening in the central part of the Hills is that the beetles have killed everything – we are surrounded by 5,000 acres of beetle killed trees. We have half the number of trees hit this year compared to last year. But that doesn't say anything about the areas of the Black Hills that have not been hit – those areas are the ones that we have to do something so that they are not facing what the central hills are facing.

Thompson: I also appreciate the difficulty you have in coming up with the figures for your Accomplishment Report Marie; I was dismayed with the "NA's" under Crook County. I talked with our Weed & Pest Manager, who is a darn good field man and less of business manager. Crook County did have a program and I would like the Accomplishment Report to reflect their numbers. Marie, keep working with Crook County.

Brannan: Greg, tell me again the two numbers I missed; the South Dakota acres.

Josten: I just combined the numbers on the chart in the columns to come up with the numbers I mentioned, you can go ahead and calculate the numbers fairly simply.

Hoyt: I was intrigued by you saying that you exceeded last year's goal of trees treated. We talked about this information in the past; about a review on a forest scale of budget vs. accomplishment vs. planned, for FY2012 and 2013. If we had a review of this information, it would give the Board a feel for what we are doing in the next six months, what we intend to accomplish, how we'll do it, how we'll fund it, and how we might address short falls. I would like to see a capsulated review of timber program.

Bobzien: That is on the agenda for this fall. Marie is also doing some things about your ethics training that we are required to provide, but what you brought up we do intend to bring that to a meeting in October or November.

Hoyt: My feeling is, the flight is done, we can begin the attack, and the sooner we have the discussion, the more informed we'll be as a Board.

Bobzien: One was your question about the BHNF timber program, but we are in an "All Lands" Strategy, we could include some additional info about the other lands as well.

Hoyt: It might be easier if we just look at how the BBNF sees it and how we are joining forces to do more later.

Scherrer: My opinion would be to bring it to the Board for November – it'll take them some time to get some data in. If we had something at our November meeting, that would give the FS some time; October might be a little early.

Hoyt: Whenever it can be done in a meaningful manner.

Scherrer: Meaningful, that's a key word. Let the minutes reflect that these guys' feet are held to the fire on these things; and we'll have a presentation at the November meeting.

Bobzien: Dave just said we have good plans for next year.

Blair: A lot of what Ev had to say is trying to think about human nature; you didn't pick up a newspaper last year that you didn't find something about MPB, it was on the news, radio, seminars, it was everywhere. One of those components is where we are at – we haven't turned the corner – human nature is "I don't want to hear any more about it", when it's still one of the top threats on the list. When the national news, a month or so ago, talked about the flight in Canada, it was so great that it was being picked up by radar. That was a scary statement. We need to know the effectiveness of the whole gamut. We need to invite some people here to get the word out.

Mertz: A few things I can tell you that may be a cause for hope; a week ago we went out with Dr. John Ball and Kurt Allen and looked at one of our cut and chunk areas that we contracted near Custer. We walked around and only saw about five or less new green hit trees. John Ball started peeling back some bark, and there is all of this evidence of Sawyer Beetles in there – these beetles don't attack live trees, they go into dead trees, and they are going into these trees immediately after the MPB. Dr. Ball tells us that the Sawyer Beetles are out competing the MPB, they're eating the floam, so they MPB doesn't have their whole live cycle to go through because they run out of food. John Ball thinks that the Sawyer Beetle has more to do with success in some of the cut and chunk areas, than the actual cut and chunk. He also said that the blue stain is actually a competitor of the MPB because it feeds off the floam as well; so the blue stain may remove the food source of the MPB. Things are starting to stack up against the MPB. This is Dr. Ball's opinion, but he's the smartest person around on this issue. I noticed trees that the County marked last year, but the trees hadn't gotten cut, and they were still alive, and the beetles are going into the same trees again. The thing that feeds an epidemic is large trees, that's the multiplier; unfortunately we've lost a lot of big trees, so when you have smaller trees, they don't produce nearly as many bugs and that's another factor that doesn't help the MPB.

Paterson: Does the Sawyer Beetle attack trees while they are still standing and starting to die? You said that you saw this in one area; do you think it is more wide spread? So are we having a knee jerk reaction when it's something that has already been taken care of?

Mertz: Oh no – don't say that – like Greg said, there are other factors involved, and no two areas are the same.

Smith: (not using the mic – so missed some comment) Entomology and that whole thing is secondary to the fact that this has been an all lands approach, and that is something to be commended for. Everyone focused on one job and getting after it and you should be commended for that great work. There will be one thing you need to guard against in the end, when the MPB winds down, there will be the “Save the Sawyer Beetle” movement!

Hoyt: Did you visit the cut and chunk area by Silver City?

Mertz: No, we just went to one outside of Custer, but Dr. Ball did go over to Silver City. Dr. Ball did say that they did a really great job in Silver City, but they’ve missed a lot of trees right nearby.

Scherrer: Following what you said Dave, the accepted opinion is that cutting and chunking buys you a year, maybe two, but the bottom line is that you have thin down the trees. Cut and chunk alone is not a solution.

Metz: That is correct.

Scherrer: Are there any comments or questions?

Bobzien: Thanks Greg for being a representative for so many groups. Thanks Hugh for the additional information from Crook County; Marie will make those updates. Like Greg said about the number in the Accomplishment being a snap shot in time, we will keep this live; so continue to feed Marie your updates. The purpose is to be more effective working together; the other is to have something when people ask questions. What’s actually occurring out there – we’ve captured that, and then the narrative of this working together, and it’s for real. I’m not sure that there is another place anywhere that is doing what we are doing, and we are working to get better. As Board members you have more reference material, we’ll get updates to you as we get them. We’ll continue to compete on collaborative restoration landscape projects; and the Accomplishment Report becomes back up for that. The last piece is – remember on your response as a Board, not only were we going to do an annual report, but you asked for a semiannual report, and it fits well with the purpose of observation, and part of our monitoring will be for learning purposes too. When we invest your taxpayer dollars, we want to be effective in doing that. Not just the numbers, but the outcomes; we have to evaluate the health, beauty and safety of the forest. Workshops; you are ambassadors and critiques of those who work with the public; and those workshops are valuable. I would like to see more specific information about the workshops in the report.

Scherrer: I appreciate some of the early data, but it is preliminary; we have a hell of a battle ahead of us too. We’ll talk about the increased fuel load and what the impacts are of that also.

We’ll take a break now and be back at 2:30.

Fire Season Report ~ Todd Pechota, Jay Esperance, Bill Kohlbrand

Scherrer: Welcome back; our next topic is very important to all of us, and I would like to turn it over to Craig to bring to the table.

Bobzien: I would like to extend my welcome to four of our leaders. All of these men have had a very, very difficult and challenging fire season that isn't over yet. We've had one tragedy; the C130 crash. It's in that context that we discuss the danger that the firefighters face, the fire season is clearly not over. Jay, Todd, Jason, and Bill, will talk about what has occurred, what the challenges are and what the restrictions are that we currently have. First up will be Jay Esperance, Wildland Fire Suppression Division Director.

Esperance: Thanks to Craig for inviting me back, I was here early in the spring, and now I've made it through a full fire season (almost). When I talked last time, my theme was interagency cooperation. That theme came home to roost during this fire season.

I would like to address some of the concerns that we heard throughout the season. One thing I want to get across to you is that Craig, Dennis and I met with our concerned publics – Craig wrote an excellent letter to the editor to try to help the public understand. Something I hear a lot is “the USFS or the Feds”, getting blamed for this or that – we all get lumped in together. When we come in to help on these fires, we all work together, the people in green get a bad reputation because of something that might have happened, but who's to say it's the FS? We've had a lot of people here working, State, Volunteers, Teams from other states, etc.

I wrote down a list of concerns that the public brought and one we face every year is the concern people (ranchers) have with burning grass. Grass is like gold to those people, it is important to them. And they always want to know why the grass is burning; we are conscientious about the value of the grass. We have to consider cost effectiveness & risk assessment prior to any decision. A lot of times what you'll find is a fire up in the timber, and if the fire is really cranking we won't put people up in there, so sometimes it is much safer to light off grass from a road to fight that timber fire. We do understand the value of grazing and take every opportunity possible to avoid burning grass.

A lot of times we hear that locals are out there busting their butts day and night and the firefighters are sitting around. The number one thing is firefighter safety – for us, the safety of our firefighters is number one and we will never compromise that safety. We will not be putting people in an unsafe place such as the head of a fire, and we will not attack a fire until we have a solid plan. It's understandable that a landowner or homeowner will do anything they can to try to stop their property from burning down, sometimes putting themselves at great risk, but that is their own response.

We also hear about houses burning, timber burning, and you have no fire fighters for us. Explanation for that is that fires need to be prioritized. There are only so many resources available and it takes a long time to get resources sometimes. Currently there are 60 outstanding orders for crews that they can't fill – someone has to make a decision about where the resources go. We have a group within our zone and we prioritize the fires in our areas. We make wise and well thought out decisions. If it gets beyond the control of our group then it goes to the Region and they have a group that makes the decisions as well. Also it's up to the incident commander

to paint a good enough evaluation of the situation so that we do get resources if they are really needed.

The next thing I heard was that we are back in the “let burn” mode. We met with the Deputy Chief of the FS in Denver, and he made it very clear that we will put out all fires. It was very clear. The FS heard that message, and we know that we will put out all fires. For the State of South Dakota, all fires are full suppression. I will challenge anyone who says we are letting fires burn for resource management. There is a fire in a wilderness area in Colorado that is 200 acres, and that will need to have Regional Forester approval to let it burn.

We’ve been accused of not listening to locals. Any good fire manager knows that the locals know what is going on. They know what the fuels are, they know where roads and water are, and it would not be too bright of us not to get that local knowledge and put it in our hip pocket. If we did not do that on any of the fires this year, we should have, and I personally apologize. When I heard about that possibly happening, I got all my state employees together and told them that “you will get the input from all locals”. From that fire on, part of a new Team delegation was to listen to the locals.

One personal incident that I had; and we haven’t had this situation on the Black Hills yet, but it could happen, I put fire on the ground and it turned out to be sacred ground. A Medicine Man came into my trailer and he was not happy; as fire managers we don’t do things on a whim. We did some fire behavior runs, and if we didn’t take some action, the runs would have wiped out the sacred site we were trying to protect and the town on the other side of it. The efforts that were done to protect that site were nothing less than heroic. In hindsight, to do it better, I will take the input from the Medicine Man, and others and we’ll sit down and discuss the consequences of various decisions, instead of me taking it upon myself. It would be better to let the locals have some buy in.

Those are the controversial things I’ve experienced this year, with that I’ll turn it over to Todd.

Pechota: Thank you; I’m the Fire Management Officer for the Black Hills National Forest. I’ll give you some highlights of this fire season.

- In the last 30 years the BHNF averaged 121 fires burning 10, 215 acres per year.
- In 2012, the BHNF has had 141 fires burning 15,255 acres. The 2012 fire season is not over.
- In 2012, the initial attack success rate on the BHNF is 94%. Meaning we controlled 133 fires at less than 100 acres.
- Four Aviators lost their lives while attempting to protect lives, property and natural resources; this is an unforgiving business.

Weather: Across the BHNF, fire indices are above the 97th percentile (setting record highs) where fuel conditions are conducive to support large fire growth. Daily temperatures during the peak summer time ranged between 90’s to 100’s, leading to RH’s in the single digits many days. Parts of South Dakota experienced the driest summer on record. Don’t be fooled by the cooler, shorter days; we have to have a moisture event to end this fire season.

Initial Attack: IA ranged from five starts to 25 starts a day; the GPC Dispatch Center was also supporting a Type 2 fire on the Rosebud Reservation, Type 2 fire in Nebraska while the Myrtle

Fire was burning on the BHNH. In addition, the Oil Creek fire was burning NW of Newcastle Wyoming. Type 4 fires transitioned to Type 3 fires rapidly on multiple fires.

The Rapid City Air Tanker base has delivered 290,000 gallons of retardant as of September 17, this activity started in March.

Currently the BHNH Interagency Helitack crew has flown 62 fire missions in the Black Hills response area. They average approximately 40 flight missions in a season. The current flight hours are at 133.7 with a majority of the flight time being Initial Attack.

Interagency Cooperation: We may not always agree on every issue, but when it comes to getting a fire staffed, we don't care whose side of the fence we are on, we don't care what color the engine is, we want to get the fire staffed.

Fire restrictions: Those decisions are not taken lightly; we have had a weekly conference call with all the Agencies since restrictions were implemented, to see what we need to do with our restrictions. Given the fuel conditions, and no forecast for any moisture for 7-14 days, we'll probably be in the restrictions for some time to come. In the 30 day outlook from Casper to west of Menards...there is no forecast for rain of any amount that would be considered a season ending event. That being said, there is some discussion at this point relative to elevating those restrictions – further restrictions would start to impact our friends in industry. The decision is not made, but we are seeing some starts from activities that we don't typically see starts from, shooting, sparks from brakes, etc. Again, what is the appropriate thing to do? If we say we are not going to allow the use of external combustion engines between certain hours, which would have a huge impact.

I also want you to know that I had nothing to do with this handout. I just got back from a fire so Jason Virtue has done all of this. Jason has been covering the Forest all summer, for that Jason, thank you.

Bill Kohlbrand: On the Wyoming side, we've had quite a season, and it continues.

2012 Season:

- 434,364 State and private acres
- \$40 million
- Crook County 300 fires, 8,000 acres
- Weston County 200 fires on 411 calls
- Largest fire 63,000 acres

One Team, One Fight:

- Cooperative Agreements
- Interstate Fire Compact
- Mutual Aid Agreements
- Annual Operating Plan
 - Identify special management areas
 - Reciprocal/Reimbursable fire protection
 - All parties respond
 - 24 hours no money changes hands
 - Retardant cost reimbursable

- Release supporting entities when incident is stabilized
 - Host agency buys supper
- Response
 - County is all volunteer
 - Volunteers respond to extent possible
 - Neighboring county responds as well
 - Forest Service responds as per run card
- If fire escapes initial attack
 - Unit Administrator Group formed if multiple ownership or other entities threatened.
 - Often use Unified Command
 - WFDSS completed if Federal land involved
 - Entities agree on options
 - Entities initiate cost share agreement
- If fire complexity exceeds our ability to manage incident
 - Order IMT2 or IMT1
 - Request assistance from FEMA if applicable
 - Wyoming Emergency fire Suppression Account (EFSA) helps with cost
 - Delegation of authority
 - Team is supposed to work for us.
- Hit it hard – go home early
 - Big response on first incident
 - Re-allocate resources if more fires break out
 - Hard to track resources
 - Easier to mobilize than paging out a new incident
 - Heavy equipment dispatched to most of our fires
 - Affected entities notified
 - Youth, organizational skills, and physical condition of Forest Service is vital
- Initial Dispatch
 - Brief on Wildcat fire; stabilized the first night and got more resources on the fire in the morning. Kept the fire at 75 acres.

Scherrer: Thank you Jay, Todd and Bill. Does the Board have any questions?

Brannan: These handouts are so helpful to have; the numbers are good to know. Thank you

Brenneisen: Todd, can you explain the difference between fires suppression in the wilderness and in other areas, and what it would look like in the Black Elk Wilderness?

Pechota: Congressionally designated Wilderness areas have a set of standards that have to be followed for management of a fire. First is that natural processes are allowed to occur; bugs, floods, fire, etc. We have the 13,500 acre Black Elk Wilderness. That Wilderness averages .8 fires a year over that last 30 years. It's not like Elk Mountain that gets fire every year. There are some things that the Forest Supervisor can approve for fire suppression in the Wilderness; such as mechanized equipment like four wheelers, pumps, chainsaws, retardant and helicopters. The Regional Forester has to approve the use of dozers in the Wilderness. We have a letters ready to go to the Regional Forester for approval of the dozer and for the mechanized equipment. Some of the large Wilderness areas have the opportunity to let fire can burn across the landscape

without risking anything. The Black Elk Wilderness is not the Bob Marshall, it is 13,000 acres and within three miles there are three towns. There is also Mount Rushmore, a large KOA Campground, etc. We fight fire in the wilderness. The biggest fire was 28.5 acres and that fire was fought with no dozers, only chainsaws, hand crews, etc. It's hard to get a dozer up a piece of granite anyway; it's just helicopters, water, and hand tools. There's never been a fire that has burned unchecked in the Wilderness.

Verchio: I live near an intersection in Hill City and after a lightening event, there'll be Forest Service trucks that will go out west and south toward Custer and another to Deerfield; do you automatically go out and monitor areas after storms?

Pechota: We have a program that is called a "lightening detection system" – actually, our best detection system is when we hear Kohlbrand start talking about a storm in Wyoming, we know it's coming our way. Both positive and negative strikes start fires, so if we have firefighters in the shop that are doing engine maintenance, etc. and we do have resources on hand, we'll send them out.

Vonk: Did you say you are considering an internal combustion ban in the Forest and if you are my question is this, in about two weeks, several hundred South Dakota residents are partaking in the hunt of their life time; and vehicles will be used. We should be coordinating with the FS. I don't know if you're talking to my regional folks, but if you're not, you should. If it's just a logging issue, that is different.

Scherrer: This whole thing just came up at about 10:30 this morning.

Bobzien: The request came from Custer State Park, who does have a restriction on internal combustion engines; the report is that it is from noon to midnight. The Park is asking us to place a similar restriction. I'll share initial information and ask for your input.

As Todd said we've had the fire season and monitoring of our weather stations, and some technical terms on the energy release component. Recognizing the spring was dryer, and no surprise to ranchers, on June 29th, I signed a Stage II Fire Restriction. Part of that purpose was that with all of the cooperators we wanted to be as consistent as we could with what goes on on all lands. There are issues with some of these. One was the opening burning of camp fires, smoking inside buildings, prohibition on welding, internal combustion engines with certain requirements, explosives, etc. It was more restrictive for fire prevention. The next level is the closing of the Forest. In the mean time we've restricted our own personnel, for off road travel, etc., but we have been very consistent with the State, etc.

Pechota: According to Jim Strain it really applies to their loggers more than anything; with the restriction of being done by noon, then having a two hour fire watch.

Brannan: What you are looking at then is the State has put the restriction in place and you are looking at staying in line with the State; for potentially managing the logging activity.

Bobzien: The first is the conditions are such that there is a reason for that ask, but there are also consequences to that. Loggers aren't the only ones that start fires, why would we say loggers and no one else? Also the time period, normally we've gone 1:00 pm rather than noon. Some of

the work activities would be impacted because the days are getting short, for people that are trying to meet the forest health goals – days are getting shorter. There is some economic impact. There are arguments for everything from no shooting to no ATV use, so I don't want to minimize what I think the ramifications are, but so are the fire risks.

Scherrer: Are there any questions from members of the Board?

Brenneisen: Has there been a decision made and if not, do you have a time frame for when the decision will be made?

Bobzien: No decision has been made. We evaluate on a weekly basis, with the other cooperators. Should we do something like that we would be gathering more information and be looking at ways to communicate. Not only that but we would have to educate and enforce it; it doesn't happen just because I sign it. Short answer is it would be days out probably next week.

Verchio: There was an offhand comment about shooting starting fires; would there be a chance of fire arms being banned because they start fires?

Bobzien: There is always a chance; we have to evaluate the risk of that against the risk of a fire, but I would say it is unlikely.

Hoyt: Bottom line then, where does it leave the 200 elk hunters?

Bobzien: There's no current restriction on them going out there the first of October, other than the basic restrictions.

Vonk: My request is, and I know that your Wednesday morning sessions are fire related, but I do think that we should have someone on the wildlife side of the Department listening in so that we are prepared for any changes on access, etc.

Smith: I hope that the FS will make a specific effort to consult with the users on whether or not there is a real need for it and give some lead time, and get some input from the loggers, sportsman, Game & Fish, etc. I can be the very worst for thinking I have the right answer but when I do a reality check, it usually isn't. As far as a ricochet starting a fire, my uncle can tell you that shooting prairie dogs can start a fire! The ripple effects of this would be tremendous. .

Blair: Jeff you are right, you need someone to listen in on those calls. Even though bullets ricocheting would be extreme; but honestly to watch a rifle at night the flame that comes out of the barrel is three or four feet long. In the eastern part of the State you get a car or truck that has a pollution device and you park in the dry grass, there is a firm possibility of starting a fire. We have pictures of trucks that have burned up while hunting ducks. My dad was an avid hunter; deer season didn't start till weeks later one year when I was a kid because we were waiting for the first snow. Sportsmen don't want a black eye in this, they'll do what is right.

Brannan: Mr. Chairman this isn't the time or place to loose site of our collaborative efforts, our firefighters are tired, and the Forest Service has made a decision. When the FS makes a decision, we follow suit in the private sector. It must first be understood what the folks were doing in Custer State Park and why they made the decision.

Smith: The other thing is that four or five of the speakers have commented on grass fires, running into opposition from grazers, because of backfires. Unutilized grass is fuel, and utilization standards add to that fuel load. We had John Thune (when he was in the House) out looking at a grazing permit and the grass was half way to your knees, because utilization standards had been met – if it had been a dry fall, that would have been all fuel loading. Right now the grass is being left for potential fuel, but if the grass was properly utilized it would help the fire danger. Craig Beckner knows of one instance where grass carried fire thru to an unburned area. My point being we can't ignore this any longer – there has been no specific direction of managing grass from a fuels standpoint, you need some cattle out there.

Scherrer: You've heard a variety of input. This is early in the game, you don't have all the data, and as a scientist, I would advocate that you get the facts, and get everyone together for a decision.

Let's take a 10 minute break, and then we'll address the last two issues.

Ecology ~ Kerry Burns

- **White Nose Syndrome & Cave Management**

Scherrer: The next item of business is a discussion lead by Kerry Burns regarding White Nose Syndrome and cave management.

Bobzien: Kerry Burns is going to give us a synopsis of the issues regarding White Nose Syndrome and its effects on bats and bat ecosystems. Some cave management precautions being taken reflect concerns about the greater ecosystem. Kerry is the Forest wildlife biologist.

Burns: White Nose Syndrome is fairly new. First I will give a brief overview of bat species. Bats have a unique membrane, and they have hands, legs, and thumbs. They have big ears. They have eyes and can see. Because they are nocturnal, they use echolocation to navigate and feed. There are nearly 1,000 species of bats, almost ¼ of all mammal species, and they are important ecologically and economically. They are important in the tropics for plant pollination and seed dispersal. In Texas, bats eat about 20 tons of insects a night. A bat can eat its weight in insects in a night. Joel Tigner weighed bats leaving a cave to feed, and then re-weighed them when they returned to the cave later that night. Some were 40% heavier when they returned to the cave.

What do bats require? During the cold months of winter, bats require caverns that have relatively constant temperatures between about 40-50 degrees Fahrenheit. During hibernation the metabolic rate of bats is usually low. Whenever they wake to eat, or to relieve themselves, each arousal is expensive in terms of fat used. Any extra arousals can result in starvation.

White Nose Syndrome was first discovered in 2006 near Albany, in New York State, in a very popular tour cave. What tipped them off was seeing bats flying during winter, when there was still snow on the ground, and seeing bats flying during the day. They were also seeing lots of dead bats on buildings, rock piles, and in snow banks. The dead bats looked like they had died of starvation. Surveys indicated White Nose Syndrome was present in five caves. The next year, it

was found in many more caves. The result was huge bat die-offs, sometimes as much as 80-90% of a cave's bat population. Huge levels of mortality.

White Nose Syndrome is a new species: *Geomyces destructans*. It is a cold-obligate organism, growing optimally between 40-50 degrees Fahrenheit (F). 68 degrees F is the upper limit for fungus growth.

The fungus spreads quickly. We don't know a lot about how it spreads, but when bats roost close together they could be providing conditions for transfer.

The human element is unknown. Research is inconclusive about whether bats can develop immunity to this fungus. Bat populations reproduce very slowly.

Are we far enough away? Since 2006 it has spread as far as Missouri, and possibly into eastern Iowa. In 2010 the Regional Forester signed a closure order for caves on Forest System lands. Black Hills bats affected are the little brown, big brown bat, northern myotis, long-eared myotis, and the tri-colored bat.

Silver-haired, Hoary and Red Bats migrate and are not at risk from white-nosed syndrome.

Nine bat species on the Forest hibernate in mines and caves. Bats may not be the only vector for potential spread of White Nose Syndrome. People may transmit White Nose Syndrome. There is some evidence it can be spread on clothing, shoes. Cave management is also people management.

The current Cave Closure Order was originally signed in 2010 by the Regional Forester, and prohibits entry into caves and mines. This same Cave Closure Order has been re-issued in subsequent years. The Forest Supervisor has authority to approve use of caves in the Black Hills, but cavers are required to employ decontamination practices. All cavers are required to clean off before entering their vehicles.

Unfortunately, cave closure signs get torn down. People collect them. We have installed some bat gates to reduce disturbance in hibernation sites. We used to open the gate doors in summer, but now we keep them closed unless we have approved research that requires access.

We are currently in the process of installing temperature and data loggers, about the size of a dime, that collect temperature and humidity data. These data loggers will help us determine if we have conditions conducive to White Nose Syndrome. This information could help support decision-making in the future.

We did some White Nose Syndrome surveys last winter, but the weather was not cold enough. We surveyed seven caves and did not find any white noses or high bat mortalities.

Right now, prevention is the best approach we have against White Nose Syndrome. The Fish and Wildlife Agency is the lead agency for information about White Nose Syndrome, and has lots of information available on its website.

You can stay informed by accessing the following websites:

www.nwhc.usgs.gov/disease_information/white-nose_syndrome

www.fws.gov/northeast/white_nose.html

www.wbwg.org/conservation/whitenosesyndrome/whitenose.html

www.caves.org/WNS/WNS%20Info.htm

Paterson: What percentage of abandon mines have signs posted. What efforts have been made to inform the public?

Burns: About 20% of caves have been posted. Mines have also been posted. Not all caves are posted; there are some caves that we do not even know about. We have issued some news releases and stories to the media.

Paterson: The education should be continued, in the spring and fall. The Forest should work to keep it in the news.

Bobzien: The Forest Service is going to have a region-wide assessment of cave management. This planned assessment is driven by concerns about White Nose Syndrome, and concerns about access to caves for recreation. We will provide more public information.

Black-Backed Woodpecker

Bobzien: There was interest expressed in having a discussion about the Black-Backed Woodpecker. Suzanne has one speaker that she had communicated with.

Suzanne: Actually the earlier exchange of emails was exploratory, to suggest we have a couple of speakers, one from the group that brought forth the petition, and then someone from South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks. The Fish and Wildlife Service in Pierre might have some insight on the issues. I would like to have an informational presentation on the Black-Backed Woodpecker, its relationship to the mountain pine beetle, the listing process, and the population presence of this species on the Forest.

Scherrer: The concept is how this affects us. There is a petition to list the Black-Backed Woodpecker as an endangered species in the Black Hills. It is a controversial issue. To have a better feel for this we talked about having a discussion, about having folks come in and speaking with us. We could potentially set this up for the November meeting. That would give us two months for planning. I ask Suzanne to work with Craig Bobzien to lock in the speakers, and plan.

Travel Management Fee Report ~ Rick Hudson

Scherrer: As part of Travel Management, we agreed to serve as the Recreation Advisory Committee for the annual fees for Travel Management, and must weigh in on the fees.

Hudson: Thank you for the opportunity to present information. A lot of the information I am providing is an update of the program during 2012. We are working on updating the Motor Vehicle Use Map 2013. The system has approximately 600 miles available for use in 2012. By 2013, we hope to have at least 640 miles available for use. That would be 90% of the total anticipated travel management system.

PowerPoint Presentation included:

- Fiscal Year 2012 –Motorized Trail Program Budget Plan (Total \$308,000)
- Motorized Trail Fee Revenue Projection
- Motorized Trail Permit sales of this year vs. last year
- Motorized Trail Permit Fees on other National Forests

The Forest is not proposing any fee changes for 2013. The Forest might need to look at fee increases for 2014.

Scherrer: Am I to understand that we if the NFAB recommended an increase of \$30, you could not do it? Did we miss the boat in terms of the timing of this meeting?

Hudson: We would have to go the Regional Forester with a change at this late date.

Scherrer: If we are going to make a recommendation, we need to hear about it sooner in the year. I want to hear the Board's input.

Blair: The year-long rate of \$25.00 is not a whole lot different than the 7 day permit. Do most people buy a year-long permit for \$5.00 more?

Hudson: Most buy the year-long permit.

Blair: This action needs to be done in June.

Hudson: I would need to know by June.

Blair: We are not close to meeting our predicted goal for revenues.

Vonk: For the Forest to raise the fee, do you have to go through a public notice process?

Hudson: Yes, and we have to go through our Recreation Advisory Committee.

Vonk: I would sure want the users to know in a very public way that this is a proposal so they could be here to talk to the Board. Also, I had a letter from a user who expressed concern that the Forest has a program, and that now the Buffalo Gap National Grasslands is setting up their program, and the two programs are not the same. That is a concern of user groups.

Scherrer: I think we all share your frustration.

Hudson: We could explore working with the Nebraska National Forest – they have their own Recreation Advisory Committee. I don't know if they would be able to tier onto ours. There is the possibility to consider having our programs be uniform.

Vonk: It would be good to consider this.

Bobzien: The past discussion was about maintaining the fees. If we are looking at fee changes, we clearly want to engage the public. Want to communicate why we would do this. Rick, I was not aware that we needed that much lead time. Jim, thank you for asking that question. We would like to have input back from the Board if they have recommendations. The Minutes should reflect that this must be on the Agenda next spring.

Heinert: Most of the permits, when are they sold?

Hudson: I think May/June/July, but I would have to check.

Heinert: It would be helpful to have that information before we decided to make a decision.

Blair: Jeff is correct. We took this to the legislature. We only lost by seven votes. Of course there were only seven people voting. The issue was not whether South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks needed to be part of this structure. We lost because we were taking the “four by fours” off the road. The industry was against us. If we are going to look at the whole State as one, then South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks should provide the lead, and we need one all-encompassing program.

Colin: What amount of funds has been spent on damaged area resulting from unauthorized travel management that occurred before the Travel Management Plan was implemented?

Hudson: I would have to look at that information.

Colin: Has money been spent on restoration?

Hudson: Yes.

Colin: Could you estimate? I am suggesting we could make a justification for higher fees to pay for restoration.

Brannan: If \$400,000 was what we expected, that is 1/5 of what we thought we would sell. Why were our estimates so off?

Hudson: Our business estimate was based on having the 600+ miles system. This year our revenue will be more than \$200,000. We hope to get to \$400,000 in future years.

Blair: You get a substantial amount of dollars through the grant process.

Scherrer: Mr. Heinert’s point was well taken. Perhaps if you meet next June, or September, think about the increase for 2015, so you have plenty of time to get the work out and plan appropriately.

Heinert: I wouldn’t say 2015. We are in the process of closing a year out now. Why not review the 2012 data anytime, and be able to make a recommendation for 2014.

Scherrer: So we would discuss this in March/April 2013?

Heinert: Yes.

Hudson: During this fiscal year, 2012, about \$50,000 was used for restoration. In terms of the data analysis discussion we are going to have, I think some effort should be made to reach out to folks involved in this industry.

Blair: We had estimated a fair amount of money from commercial use, and we hardly obtain any information from that industry.

Scherrer: I think our estimates were wild-ass estimates.

Paterson: Is that restoration of trails that are part of the active program, or not part of the program?

Hudson: Restoration work was accomplished on areas trails that are not part of the active program.

Paterson: We need to discuss this by May.

Hudson: The sooner the better.

Scherrer: Let's bring this to a vote/motion, recognizing that in 2013 the Forest will have several months to determine the best time for us to have this discussion.

Paterson: If we are going to be adding miles of trails each year, we should be considering restoration of the damaged areas during the same year.

Blair: I move that in January 2013, the Board will review year-end data from 2011-2012 with the purpose of planning the travel management fee schedules and program for the year 2014.

Heinert: Second.

Suzanne: We have had the discussion about the fee structure, and we considered that if we needed to make changes we would need a speaker to review data gathered. The motion on the table addresses my concern.

Blair: We should have the discussion so that the parties, players involved in this can come, possibly in February, so they can come to the meeting and have a voice.

Motion passed unanimously.

Paterson: Do we need to vote on the fees for 2013?

Scherrer: No.

Bobzien: Many of you who have been on the Board will remember Chief Dale Bosworth. He is going to be a speaker at the DSF conference on October 10th, at the Lodge in Deadwood. He will be speaking about collaboration on the National Forest.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Scherrer: Thank you to the Board for your attentiveness. Is there anyone here from the public who would like to speak?

Nancy Hilding: Thank you for all the data on the fire history. I know you are all busy but this is long term. I would like more information about whether the risk of fire is a result of climate conditions and weather conditions or of fuels condition. Structure stage, bugs, what really was going on there? What were the ignition sources, and how do they relate to all the other conditions? I would like a quality check on whether the vegetative condition is what is driving fire occurrences. Is it climate that is driving occurrences, or lots of people having access to the Hills?

Meeting Adjourned

Scherrer: Can I have a motion to adjourn?

Paterson: So moved.

Brannan: Second.

The meeting was adjourned.

Next Meeting is scheduled for October 17, 2012.